

Appendix A

June 6, 2003, Press Release “Murkowski Approves Full Education Funding,” June 6, 2003, Letter from Governor Murkowski to All School Superintendents

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Governor Murkowski

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Murkowski Approves Full Education Funding

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 6, 2003 No. 03-126

Murkowski OKs SB 202, Approves Full Education Funding Calls on School Districts for Greater Accountability

(Juneau) - Governor Frank H. Murkowski today signed SB 202, a bill that increases the per pupil amount of state funding for public schools and changes the method of state funding for pupil transportation. In doing so, Murkowski said he would fully fund education at \$701.3 million, a level \$32 million higher than FY03. Murkowski also agreed to support full school debt reimbursement in the operating budget, an increase of \$13 million, for a total of \$66 million.

"Today I am pleased to sign Senate Bill 202," Murkowski said. "By adding \$32 million into the school foundation formula, this bill gives schools more financial resources. It will increase the school funding program by 3.9% -- the largest increase in a decade. SB 202 also creates a new way to fund pupil transportation through a grant program that potentially gives schools the resources and the opportunity to transport more children to and from school with an incentive to reduce costs."

Murkowski noted that sacrifices were made in other parts of the FY04 budget, in order to fully fund education. "We will be announcing those sacrifices in the near future," he said. "With full funding, I expect full accountability by the education community in improving student proficiency."

Murkowski challenged educators, parents, school board members, and others involved in public education to use the funds in the classroom in a way that would better educate young Alaskans. Murkowski recognized that added dollars alone are not the answer to better education, and called for stronger effort to align state adopted standards with the priorities of individual districts. Murkowski urged school districts to reduce their administrative overhead and to put the savings into the classroom. He also expressed concern about the great disparity among districts in student proficiency (ranging from 10 percent to 90 percent) on benchmark exams. He was particularly concerned that only 40 percent of 8th graders were proficient in math.

"This time around, we are able to fully fund education," he said. "But it's the local school, with its teachers, school board members, superintendents, administrators, parents, and local communities, that carry the heavy responsibility of using these funds

wisely to deliver the results of a better education for Alaska's children. I am looking to all of you to be accountable for the best use of the funds provided by SB 202."

In addition to increasing the per-pupil amount available to local schools by adding in the \$32 million formerly in the Learning Opportunity Grants program, SB 202 converts the state funding program for pupil transportation from a reimbursement to a grant program.

"Under the current reimbursement program, there is no incentive for local school districts to find efficiencies," Murkowski said. "This bill provides those incentives, because if the schools can provide more efficient busing, they can apply any savings from the grant to other classroom activities."



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Governor Frank Murkowski

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Murkowski earlier today faxed the attached letter explaining his decision to fully fund education, with the expectation of accountability, to the superintendents of the 53 school districts in Alaska.

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STATE OF ALASKA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
JUNEAU

June 6, 2003

Dear Superintendent:

Today I am pleased to sign Senate Bill 202. By adding \$32 million into the school foundation formula, this bill gives schools more financial resources to get the job done. It will increase the school funding program by 3.9 percent--the largest increase in a decade. SB 202 also creates a new way to fund pupil transportation through a grant program that potentially gives schools the resources and the opportunity to transport more children to and from school with an incentive to reduce costs.

It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to the education community our new Commissioner of Education, Roger Sampson, whom many of you know, and to thank Karen Rehfeld and Eddy Jeans for the extraordinary assistance they have provided during the first months of our administration. I would also like to share the vision of Commissioner Sampson, who said to me during our first meeting after his appointment, "It's not a matter of more money, but how we direct our resources toward quality instruction that is aligned with our state-adopted standards and the priorities of individual districts."

Signing this legislation holds K-12 education harmless from the budget-reductions taking place in this year's operating and capital budgets. The much-discussed reductions to education we initially proposed for FY04 resulted in a reality check. For example, the Legislature converted pupil transportation from a cost plus program to a grant program, which gives districts incentives to control and restrain transportation costs.

This time around, we are able to fully fund education. But it's the local school, with its teachers, school board members, superintendents, administrators, parents, and local communities, that carry the heavy responsibility of using these funds wisely to deliver the desired result of a better education for Alaska's children. I am looking to all of you to be accountable for the best use of the funds provided by SB 202.

I am challenging all of Alaska's educators, parents, school board members, community leaders, and residents to take a hard look at how our schools are run. We need to get more dollars from administration into the classroom. Why do

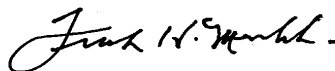
some school districts exceed the state requirement of using more than 70 percent of the funds they receive in the classroom, and others do not? There is great disparity in student performance from school to school and district to district. Why are some of our schools only able to show less than 10 percent of their students proficient on a benchmark exam, while other schools are able to show more than 90 percent of their students proficient on the same exam? Ask yourselves these hard questions:

- Do your schools have a clear and ambitious strategic plan or shared vision that includes high expectations for all students and checkpoints along the way to ensure their progress?
- Are your teachers using research-proven instructional practices?
- Do all staff know and understand your district's vision and priorities?
- Are your schools and students meeting the standards and priorities of the school district?
- Are your student performance standards in reading, writing and math clear, sequential and aligned with state standards?
- Have your schools identified effective strategies to help students who are not meeting state standards?
- Are your instruction, student assessments and standards aligned?
- Are you making the best use of state education dollars to help all students meet standards?
- If students in your schools are not meeting standards, why not?
- Do you have a continuous improvement process in place?

These aren't all the questions you should be asking. But the answers will begin to tell us whether we and our schools are working as smart as we can to use our financial resources in the best interests of our children and the future of Alaska.

The Murkowski administration pledges to continue to make financial resources available, but we need to hold recipients of these resources accountable for excellent educational results. SB 202 is a major step in the right direction, but requires us all to take responsibility today for the wise use of the funds to create a brighter tomorrow for Alaska's children.

Sincerely yours,



Frank H. Murkowski
Governor